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P 301103Z MAY 08  
FM AMEMBASSY SOFIA  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5085  
INFO RUEHBS/AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS PRIORITY 0287  
RULSDMK/DEPT OF TRANSPORTATION WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS PRIORITY  
RHMFIUU/FAA NATIONAL HQ LONGMONT WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY 0004

UNCLAS SOFIA 000344

SENSITIVE  
SIPDIS

PASS TO EUR/NCE LAURA LOCHMAN, MARK TURNER, VALDA  
VICKMANIS-KELLER  
PASS TO EEB/TRA/OTB MEGAN WALKLET-TIGHE AND KRISTIN  
GUSTAVSON  
PARIS FOR FAA REP  
FAA FOR AFS-50/API/AGC-7

E.O. 12958: N/A  
TAGS: [EAIR](#) [ECON](#) [BU](#)  
SUBJECT: BULGARIA CIVAIR: FAA UPGRADES BULGARIA TO  
CATEGORY 1

REF: STATE 44304

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: In a second round of discussions on May 21, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) upgraded Bulgaria's Directorate General Civil Aviation Administration (DGCAA) to Category 1 status, opening the possibility of eventual direct flights between the United States and Sofia by a Bulgarian air carrier or by a codeshare with a U.S. air carrier. Category 1 status would also allow for the Department of Defense (DOD) personnel on official travel to use Bulgarian air carriers. The decision follows an initial meeting in January (REFTEL) in which the FAA laid out improvements necessary for the DGCAA to meet International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) standards. The decision included clauses allowing for a follow-up visit within one year, or in the event a Bulgarian air carrier applies to provided service to the United States or codeshare with a U.S. air carrier. The FAA agreed to Prime Minister Stanishev's request to hold off making a public announcement of the decision until his official visit to Washington in mid-June. END SUMMARY.

12. (SBU) The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and the Bulgarian Directorate General Civil Aviation Administration (DGCAA) discussed issues concerning civil aviation safety between the two countries on May 21, 2008. The formal final discussions were a follow-up to the FAA's January 2008 International Aviation Safety Assessment (IASA). At that time, the FAA IASA team indicated that the Bulgarian DGCAA was not in compliance with the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) standards for aviation safety in the following areas: hiring and retaining qualified inspectors to perform oversight activities; and developing and implementing an airman licensing and operator certification systems. The FAA team discussed possible corrective measures with the DGCAA and urged Bulgarian officials to take prompt action after the January IASA.

13. (SBU) During the final discussions in Sofia on May 21, the FAA team reviewed the noted safety oversight deficiencies and corrective measures taken since the January assessment. The FAA team consisted of:

Dawn R. H. Veatch, Team Leader, Division Manager Flight Standards, Southern Region  
Michael Daniel, Manager Singapore IFO  
Mark Bury, Associate Chief Counsel, AEU-7 (Legal)  
Lirio Liu, FAA Senior Representative, US Embassy Paris

As Bulgaria is an European Union (EU) member, the FAA team also invited a member of the European Aviation Safety Agency (EASA), Georges Rebender, as an observer.

¶4. (SBU) During the final discussions, the FAA Team recommended upgrading the Bulgarian DGCAA to Category 1 -- in compliance with ICAO aviation safety standards -- and FAA HQ concurred. The FAA team and the DGCAA signed a "record of discussions" on May 21, which was sent to FAA HQ in Washington. Post expects a formal congratulatory letter from FAA HQ that Post will give to the Bulgarian government in the next few weeks. The "record of discussions" also includes clauses allowing for a follow-up FAA visit within the next year, or at the time when a Bulgarian air carrier applies to provide service to the United States or codeshare with a U.S. air carrier, to ensure that the DGCAA is maintaining Category 1 standards.

¶5. (SBU) On May 22, the FAA team formally presented the "record of discussions" to Bulgarian Minister of Transportation Petar Mutafchiev, Deputy Minister of Transportation Krassimira Martinova and DGCAA Director General Zahari Alexiev, informing them about the next steps to upgrade to Category 1. No official press release was made at the time. Prime Minister Sergei Stanishev requested that FAA and Post hold the public FAA announcement until his trip to Washington in mid-June.

¶6. (SBU) During their official out-brief, FAA team members thanked Post for its efforts to keep pressure on Bulgarian officials to meet ICAO standards. The team requested that Post continue supporting the DGCAA, which has requested more

funding from the Bulgarian government to increase its staff and employee salaries. They also noted that the FAA made its decision to upgrade Bulgaria to Category 1 status before the EU's expected official announcement that would remove Bulgaria's "safeguard clause" on aviation safety.  
Beyrle